**How is expertise-oriented evaluation different from other approaches?**

Expertise evaluation relies primarily on professional expertise to judge an institution, program, product or activity. Most of the other evaluation approaches that we have seen so far involve some sort of value judgment. This approach is different because it relies on an “expert” or “experts” in a given field to judge whether or not the institution, program etc. has merit. Evaluators are operating on a set of previously decided upon criteria and are using their expertise to pass judgment and make recommendations.

**What are the criteria used for formal professional review systems?**

In formal professional review systems there is a structure for review already in place and published standards for their use in a review process. Reviews are expected to take place on regular pre-established intervals. A panel of experts is used to give their expert opinions and agree with the final report. The outcome of the review has a direct impact on the status of what is being reviewed.

**What are the strengths and limitations of expert-oriented evaluation approaches?**

The strengths are:

* The external perspective provided by the use of outside reviewed
* The self-study phase can provide valuable information
* The ability to translate educated observations into statements about program quality

The limitations are:

* Expertise may only be presumed and therefore not publicly respected
* Professionals may not be able to police their own operations vigorously enough
* The growth of accrediting agencies may suggest that professional self-interest is being placed before other interests.
* Confidentiality issues can exist

**Are there noticeable commonalities associated with participation-orientated evaluation approaches?**

They depend on inductive reasoning. They believe that understanding emerges from a process and it is the end product. They use many different forms of data. Participation-orientated evaluation approaches do not follow a standard plan. Each evaluation may be different. They record multiple rather than single realities because they are using many different perspectives when gathering data.

**What are the strengths and limitations associated with the participatory evaluation approach?**

The strengths are:

* It uses both qualitative and quantitative data methods
* It directs the attention of the evaluation to the needs of those for whom the evaluation is being done
* It stresses the importance of using different viewpoints
* It is flexible
* It includes stakeholders that are often left out of the process

The limitations are:

* It may not be subjective because of the way it is conducted
* It often takes a long time to complete and a decision may have to be made before the evaluation is complete
* It is costly because of the time it takes

**Should we try to consolidate evaluation approaches and come up with a generic approach?**

The evaluation process would be simplified if we could consolidate the approaches, but it would be a difficult task because the key aspects of some approaches do not align with central concerns in others. If evaluation methods were consolidated it would bring an end to expansion in the field and some approaches have not been around long enough to know whether they should be discarded or not. Expansion and not consolidation is necessary for continued growth in the field.

**How can I decide what evaluation method to use?**

According to Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) “That question is devilishly difficult to answer because of one simple fact: There is almost no research to guide one’s choices.” (p. 156) When more research is available as to the merits of each approach, things might change, until then the choice of what method to use will be up to the evaluator. They went on to say, “The way in which evaluators determine which approach(s) to employ in a given situation is not based on scientific inquiry or empirical testing; rather, it is based on philosophical, methodological, and client preferences.” (p. 165)

When I was considering what I would be able to connect with as far as formal review processes went I realized that I was directly involved in one a number of years ago. My family lived in a very small community in Manitoba called Waskada. My children attended a small K-12 school in the community that housed approx. 70 children. The school board, at that time, was anxious to close the doors on this little school claiming that it was a financial drain and the children might be better educated elsewhere. I was a member of the parent council at that time and volunteered to be on the school review committee.

I think that this was a formal review evaluation because the structure of the review process was written in board policy before the review process was started. The standards to use for judgment were there as well. The board would consider things like numbers of students, programs offered, bussing issues, program delivery costs etc. The schedule for the evaluation was set. No school could be closed without 2 years of notice from the time they were put on review. The final reason that it seemed like a formal review process was because the result of the review would certainly have an impact on all stakeholders. The “experts” that comprised the review committee were board members, school representatives, parent council members, town council members, representatives from the municipalities in the catchment area and community members. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) state, “ ‘If community volunteers are viewed as “experts” in the needs of the community,’ and if they are assisted by subject-matter consultants in some way, then the evaluation process may come closer to the expertise-oriented approach…” (p.119)

In the midst of this expertise- orientated evaluation was also what I think was responsive evaluation. All stakeholder groups that would be affected by the evaluation were represented in some way. Everyone was allowed to have a voice. Case studies were done of different situations. The process was done to assess whether or not the school would remain open and continue to deliver programming within the community or whether it would close its doors and programming would resume elsewhere. The evaluation was not done to improve the program already in existence. According to Shufflebeam (2001)), “The main thrust of the case study approach is to delineate and illuminate a program, not necessarily to guide its development or to assess or judge its merit and worth.” (p.28) I don’t think anyone ever denied that the programming that was being delivered in the small school was not good programming except in the case of some high school subjects that the school was unable to offer because of limited resources.

When a responsive evaluation is done, a single set of recommendations is not possible in the end. There are too many perspectives and opinions for this to be the case. In this case the result of the evaluation would have a much different affect on the students then it would have on community business owners or other stakeholders.

It seemed odd that a participant-oriented evaluation would go hand in hand with an expertise-orientated formal review evaluation. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) go on to say, “We have given more space to responsive evaluation than to other participation oriented evaluation approaches because, as eclectics, we believe that responsive evaluation can be included in all other approaches. The focus on responsive evaluation is on audience concerns and issues-on the information they want the evaluator to provide.” (p.139)

All stakeholders involved had a voice and a multiplicity of data was used; statistics from former years and upcoming school years, surveys conducted with various interest groups, interviews with interested parties, panel discussions that involved review members and the community, etc. The process was very labor intensive.

It also seemed to me that even though participant evaluation is different in some ways from empowerment evaluation, I could see some similarities. The evaluation process, in this case, did not set out to empower a certain group of people, but as the process continued, empowerment was what I did see in our community. By having a voice and the opportunity to participate in our own evaluation, we gained strength and empowerment and were able to present the case for our small community in a much different way.

Participatory evaluation has some political anchors. The school board would have to justify to government why they felt the need to close our school. As the communities’ voice got stronger, the school board’s justifications would have to remain intact. Boody (2009) states, “A third reason often given for participatory evaluation is a political rationale-the idea that evaluation should promote the democratic flow of information, or upset entrenched, unfair, and oppressive power structures, or both.” (p.49) Rather than have the school board come in to the community and close the school, they would open up the lines of communication and have it be a more democratic process.

The school remains open to this day, so the evaluation process must have worked to open up lines of communication. All stakeholders were put in the position of not only offering their own information to the evaluation process, but they had to listen and to consider other stakeholder’s opinions as well.

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